

Stille krachten van de verzorgingsstaat. De precaire professionalisering van de sociaal-culturele beroepen
M.J.S. Spierts

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'Geitenwollen sokken', dat is het beeld dat lange tijd aan ze kleefde: jongerenwerkers, sociaal-cultureel werkers, opbouwwerkers en vormingswerksters. Het beeld dateert uit de jaren zestig en zeventig, de periode waarin deze sociaal-culturele professionals het meest van zich lieten horen. Minder bekend is dat ze de 'uitvinders' zijn van allerlei vernieuwingen, zoals dorps- en buurthuizen, bibliotheken, speeltuinen, activering van werkelozen, kinderopvang, volwasseneneducatie, poppodia, buurtbemiddeling en *community arts*.

In dit proefschrift beschrijft Marcel Spierts de stormachtige ontwikkeling van de sociaal-culturele beroepen na de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Hij laat zien hoe de naoorlogse politieke en culturele elite deze kersverse professionals opzadelde met torenhoge verwachtingen ten aanzien van modernisering en individuele ontplooiing. Hoe in de jaren zestig en zeventig het werk radicalliseerde, en in de decennia daarna de ontnuchtering en bezuinigingen volgden. Maar ook hoe na de politieke moorden van deze eeuw de belangstelling voor het werk terugkeerde. Opmerkelijk daarbij is hoe jongerenwerkers, sociaal-cultureel werkers, opbouwwerkers en vormingswerksters er in al die stormen toch in slagen om hun professionaliteit, vakmanschap en ambachtelijkheid naar een hoger plan te tillen.

Marcel Spierts is zelfstandig onderzoeker op het gebied van sociaal werk, educatie en cultuur. Hij schreef en redigeerde drie boeken over de sociaal-culturele beroepen: *Balanceren en stimuleren*, *Beroep in ontwikkeling* en *Werken aan openheid en samenhang*.

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De precaire professionalisering
van de sociaal-culturele beroepen

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door

Marcel Joseph Simon Spierts

geboren te Heerlen

Summary

Silent forces of the welfare state.

The precarious professionalization of the socio-cultural occupations

In the Netherlands and in the rest of the world, the socio-cultural occupations struggle with the tension between the pursuit of professionalization and an appeal to voluntary commitment of citizens. The transformation of the welfare state brings this tension to a head. In an attempt at keeping the welfare state financially feasible, successive governments in the Netherlands strongly appeal to citizens taking their responsibilities. The Second Rutte cabinet, the current Dutch government aims to increasingly cut down on paid professional work and replace it with volunteer work. Budget cuts lead to job losses and de-professionalization. However, the call for more voluntary efforts does not logically lead to fewer professionals. As it turns out, there is a lot of work in 'leaving more tasks up to citizens'. The Social Support Act (*Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning*, WMO), introduced in 2007, specifically calls on professionals to entice citizens in taking their responsibility. This has led to numerous professionalization projects. Thus, processes of de-professionalization and re-professionalization occur simultaneously in the socio-cultural occupations. A historical approach is needed in order to understand this.

The dissertation examines the historical development of the professionalization of the socio-cultural occupations in the Netherlands. I consider socio-cultural workers (*sociaal-cultureel werkers*), youth workers (*jongerenwerkers*), community organizers (*opbouwwerkers*) and educational workers (*vormingswerkers*) as belonging to the socio-cultural occupations. The central research question of this dissertation is: *how has professionalization of the socio-cultural occupations developed since 1945, and what internal and external (f)actors influence this?* In answering the research question I am not primarily concerned with a historical documentation of the various socio-cultural occupations or types of work. I am particularly interested in the relationship between the development of the socio-cultural professions and the debate on the organization of society, especially the vicissitudes of the welfare state. By studying and analyzing the interconnectedness of the socio-cultural professions and society, it is possible to visualize (shifts in) orientations and patterns that determine the professionalization process.

Part I of the study develops an approach to describe and understand processes of professionalization. Part II follows with a historical reconstruction of socio-cultural occupations since 1945. Part III summarizes the main findings, answers the research question, focuses on the future, and explores the broader implications of the study.

Part I

Part I introduces the research question and lays out the conceptual framework. In *chapter 1*, the main question is divided into two parts. “Professionalization” in this study includes the development of both professionalism and craftsmanship. By “professionalism” I mean the extent to which an occupation meets the requirements that make it a discernable and recognized profession. Central to this issue is the relationship between the socio-cultural professions and society. I reserve “craftsmanship” for the norms, standards, and rules that occupational peers use to determine “good work”. Here, the focus is mainly on the relationship between occupation and individual practitioner. This chapter also discusses the public debate on professionalization as it was conducted in the Netherlands since the beginning of this century. Under headings such as “occupational honor” (*beroepseer*) and “occupational pride” (*beroepstrots*) a movement has emerged, striving for more recognition and appreciation of public professionals’ achievements in their daily work. Socio-cultural professionals have not benefited much from this movement.

What does the concept of profession entail? How do processes of professionalization develop? *Chapter 2* addresses these questions by dealing with theories of professionalization. The image of the “classical” professions has long dominated theory development. This strongly emphasized occupational control, in which the professions themselves regulate and control the work and the conditions under which it takes place. More recently, questions have been raised concerning this discourse. A “modern” discourse is crystallizing, aiming to show that professionalism has several faces. It argues that professionalization is increasingly developing into a hybrid phenomenon. The environments in which professionals operate are dynamic and ever-changing. Hence the meanings and interpretations of professionalization are not fixed. As a result of these changes the work of professionals is surrounded by ambiguity. Quite often there is a lack of clarity about the objectives and implementation of the work. Drawing from a number of sources, including Freidson’s ideal-typical model of professionalism, Schön’s plea for reflective professionalism and Sennett’s interpretation of craftsmanship, I develop sensitizing concepts with which I am able to describe and understand the developments concerning professionalism and craftsmanship since 1945. In this, I consider professionalization as the struggle over meanings and interpretations of professionalism and craftsmanship. The research strategy aims to describe manifestations of professionalism and craftsmanship, and to look for coherence with developments in society and policy. I am also curious about the extent to which there is a certain “growth” or “development” of professionalism and craftsmanship in socio-cultural occupations.

Part II

Part II contains the historical reconstruction of the socio-cultural professions, which includes the empirical part of this study. This takes place in four periods that cover as many chapters.

Chapter 3 (1945-1960) provides insight into the construction and expansion of the welfare state. Increasing government involvement and interference leads to all sorts of new regulations and a comprehensive network of services. Also, the number of professionals increase, and specialized training programs are developed for the socio-cultural occupations. Especially the political and intellectual elites have high expectations of the contribution of the socio-cultural occupations to “socioeconomic modernization” and “spiritual-cultural contemplation”. This strongly emphasizes the development of the individual and his social integration. There is also a strong belief in the role that universities can play in the development of the socio-cultural occupations, as is apparent from the rise of “scientific methods” such as social group work and community development. However, we cannot yet speak here of crystallized methodologies. The tools of professionals are limited and are hardly proportionate to the high expectations and lofty goals that are imposed from the outside. Nevertheless, social group work and community development contribute to the emergence of the craftsmanship of socio-cultural professionals. The dynamic that is characteristic of this period is at odds with the prevailing image of the “dull” Fifties.

Chapter 4 (1965-1980) describes how the government elucidates “promoting welfare” as its central political task. Welfare grows into being the heart of the welfare state and dominates the political and social debate. Both the government and the welfare sector – and the socio-cultural occupations as part of it – drastically expand their objectives by adopting “democratization” and “societal change” into their programs. Compared to the previous period, a reversal has occurred in the relationship between individual and society: the realization of self-fulfillment is preceded by the change of social structures. Within the socio-cultural occupations, new methods are in vogue, such as social action and experiential learning. It indicates the development of professionalism and craftsmanship, but the yield is limited. This is due mainly to a battle between ‘moderates’ and ‘radicals’, in which old approaches – social group work and community development – and new ones, become the stakes. The discussions between these groups have a high ideological content and focus on principles, objectives, and structures. Professionalism and craftsmanship in those discussions fade into the background. A feature of this period is the occurrence of both construction and deconstruction of the socio-cultural occupations. Proponents of professionalization advocate an “open profession” and establish an occupational code of conduct. Their efforts, however, find little support and are undermined from within the occupational community. Many professionals have doubts about their occupational identity and self-understanding and question the pursuit of professionalization itself.

Chapter 5 (1980-2000) shows how the welfare state is mired into a crisis. Welfare is still part of the core of the public debate, but, compared to the previous period, framed in a negative fashion. The philosopher Achterhuis – operating from Illich's ideas – plays a major role in this development. By focusing his efforts on the “perverse” nature of social work and absolutizing the power of professionals, he exacerbates the critique of the welfare sector. Achterhuis thereby nurtures the idea that citizens should realize their own welfare and that the government should take significant steps back. In the early 1980s, the political right makes this left-libertarian ideology their own, resulting in budget cuts and restructuring. In the welfare sector this leads to increasingly ‘corporatized’ and business-managerial styles and approaches (*verzakelijking*), but – in spite of the prevailing image of this period – this does not significantly undermine the field. There are budget cuts, but their impact is not disastrous. Sometimes local governments absorb the cuts of higher authorities, limiting the consequences. The impact of Achterhuis is mainly “ideological” in nature. Socio-cultural professionals do not succeed in formulating a rebuttal in the public opinion, and this erodes the professional identity. Meanwhile, however, the field displays many new developments, dynamics and differentiations. Sometimes they arise as an answer to societal developments (second chance education), sometimes in response to public policy (projects for school drop-outs), or a combination of both (neighborhood approach – *wijkaanpak*). In the 1990s trends also indicate transformation rather than a downturn: socio-cultural professionals set themselves more practical goals and conduct their work more methodically and businesslike. Professionalism and craftsmanship obtain new impulses in occupational profiles for community organizing, educational work and socio-cultural work. All things considered, the field is more resistant and more autonomous than what the dominant image would have us suspect.

Chapter 6 (2000-2010) describes and analyzes the transformation of the welfare state into an activating welfare state. The government ascribes a key role to participation. The sharpening of social and cultural contrasts and the rise of populism are also discussed. Social issues such as security and integration become politicized. Because of the urgency and immediacy of the social problems, the government has a tendency to impose its participation-agenda on socio-cultural professionals. This forces socio-cultural professionals more emphatically than before to relate to and position themselves vis-à-vis the political apparatus. This appears to inconvenience them somewhat. Socio-cultural professionals take on a strongly defensive stance, as their professional discretion is threatened. The impatience and ambition displayed by the government do not correspond with the leeway socio-cultural professionals are provided. The government's tendency to instrumentalize socio-cultural professionals is not a favorable condition for the development of professionalism and craftsmanship. Compared to the previous period, its continuation is arduous. However, the development of professionalism and craftsmanship does not fall to a complete stand-still. As participation gains popularity in several areas, socio-cultural professionals spread out across numerous social practices during this period. By more explicitly taking on roles such as the

initiator, designer, scout, coach, and connecter, socio-cultural professionals conduct their work in a more focused manner, compared to the past.

Part III

Part III first draws conclusions from the historical reconstruction and examines what lessons flow from it for the future. What are the prospects for the professionalization of the socio-cultural occupations and how can the experiences of the past be of use for it? The dissertation closes with some current societal debates.

Chapter 7 answers the research question. To this end, it first outlines the development of professionalism and craftsmanship. Regarding professionalism, socio-cultural professions do not fit the image of an ideal-typical professionalism of classic professions such as doctor and lawyer. In comparison, socio-cultural professionals have less status, less developed specialist knowledge, reduced autonomy and a less powerful claim on its own domain of expertise. The picture of craftsmanship is more positive. Especially “(ped)agogical craftsmanship” (*agogisch vakmanschap*) – the way in which professionals shape communication and interaction with participants – has been highly developed over the course of history. Seeking and finding connection with vulnerable citizens or “difficult” youth appears to be a struggle. But time and again there are professionals who think of novel solutions, ranging from living room and porch conversations to enabling intermediaries or the introduction of forms of play that facilitate people becoming acquainted. Also, professionals develop a wide range of “innovative arrangements” over the course of time, such as projects for the unemployed, summer camps, music venues, language training for immigrants, community mediation, and community art.

This chapter concludes at the same time that the interpretation of professionalism and craftsmanship used so far is inadequate in bringing the image of the socio-cultural occupations into focus. In particular, the unspoken and elusive dimension of professional action has still been insufficiently portrayed: “the thousand little everyday moves that add up in sum to a practise”, as put forward by Sennett. In the further course of the dissertation, I therefore distinguish two dimensions of craftsmanship: *competent craftsmanship* and *artisanal craftsmanship*. Competent craftsmanship emphasizes expertise and the norms, standards, and rules for good work on which occupational peers have agreed. Artisanal craftsmanship emphasizes the subjective and personal nature of professional activity that is reflected in the aspects of “embodiment”, “embedding”, “experience and intuition”, and “improvisation and experimentation”. These four aspects are a constant in the practice of socio-cultural professionals. They bring eminent expression to the fact that it is all about working with people, and the professionals themselves are the main instruments.

The picture that emerges from the historical reconstruction on the professionalization of the socio-cultural occupations is not without ambiguity. Professionalization,

de-professionalization and re-professionalization alternate at high speeds and sometimes occur simultaneously. The shape and identity of the socio-cultural occupations are never fixed. Concerning competent and artisanal craftsmanship much has been developed, which should provide the necessary internal robustness. However, the development of professionalism lags behind, leaving the legitimacy of the socio-cultural occupations vulnerable to the outside world. The chapter identifies a number of factors that affect the simultaneous occurrence of robustness and vulnerability, the two faces of the socio-cultural professions. As internal factors the chapter identifies the open nature of the profession, the limited degree of organization, and the professionals' differences of opinion. External factors are the relationship to the state and politics, the roles of elites and science, and links with the wider public.

At the end of the chapter, the issue of growth and development of the profession is discussed. The investigation has revealed that in the last thirty years a professional logic has developed. This "logic of activation" is the substantive heart of the socio-cultural occupations. The logic is characterized by five elements: "Joining and aligning", "empowerment", "partnership", "arranging and staging", and "connecting". Although the "logic of activation" needs further development, with this logic, socio-cultural professionals are owners of a strong narrative.

Chapter 8 focuses on the future and examines what an appropriate form of professional development of the socio-cultural occupations might look like. I advocate a strategy of conjoining professionalization which does not presuppose the mandatory aspects of classical professionalism, nor takes as its starting point the fragmentation of professional domains. Conjoining professionalization recognizes the complexity and variety of professional work and focuses on the coherent development of artisanal craftsmanship, competent craftsmanship and professionalism. In the development of artisanal craftsmanship for socio-cultural professionals, Sennett's plea for restoring the workshop is especially important. Communities of Practice are a modern version of the workshop and provide socio-cultural professionals an excellent opportunity to develop their sensibility for artisanal craftsmanship. Communities of practise also appear an appropriate means in making socio-cultural professionals (co-)owners of the process of further professionalization. In the development of competent craftsmanship, Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner offers inspiration. His directions for reflection-on-action challenge socio-cultural professionals to dwell more on dilemmas, divergent views, and the ethical, normative and emotional questions concerning professional behavior. Socio-cultural professionals can also, much more explicitly than is now the case, question to what extent their efforts are effective. The chapter furthermore pays attention to the ways in which socio-cultural professionals could productively cooperate with scientists for occupational development. In developing professionalism, the question is how socio-cultural professionals could stand their ground in a context characterized by administrative turbulence and political dependence. Freidson's proposals for institutional ethics contain interesting clues. They offer socio-cultural professionals and their managers tools to remain focused on

their own values when they are confronted with changes in the environment. These include the freedom to determine the goals of the work; adhering to the realization of a public good, even under conditions of externally imposed standards with which they conflict; to defend professional discretion and to prioritize the quality of delivered work.

Conjoining professionalization has its stake in the coherent development of artisanal craftsmanship, competent craftsmanship, and professionalism. That corresponds to an important lesson from history: when occupational organization, structuring, and control is seen as an end in itself, this does not always serve the development of artisanal craftsmanship, competent craftsmanship, and professionalism. In contrast, when the latter receives most attention, it fortifies the position of professionals, and, moreover, this contributes to the quality of the work. When the development of artisanal craftsmanship, competent craftsmanship, and professionalism is sustained and continued long enough, it will eventually also have positive effects on the recognition of the profession and occupational organization.

Chapter 9 explores the wider relevance of this study and discusses the position of socio-cultural professionals in a number of current societal debates. The logic of activation provides socio-cultural professionals with a strong narrative, but as “silent forces” they hardly make their voices heard in public debates, even though they have much to contribute there, for instance in the discussions on the “participation society”. To achieve more volunteering, a key role is ascribed to civil society. If more people participate in neighborhoods, associations, and all kinds of communal bonds, there will be more social cohesion and thus more informal care will arise, or so it is expected. This pre-eminently requires the efforts of socio-cultural professionals, who in the past have shown themselves to be “participation pioneers”. Through the “logic of activation” they contribute significantly to the “participation society”. Not, as the government does, by pointing people to their own responsibility and rendering a “public issue”, such as care, a “private problem”. They celebrate the reverse motto, mindful of C. Wright Mills: *to translate private troubles into public issues*. Socio-cultural professionals have made it their trademark to give a public and corporate spin on individual problems. In their “public works” they encourage people to work together. Thus, they try to “live democracy by example” and to create practices of “lived democracy”. In that sense, they are “exemplary” for other public and social professionals. In numerous ways they have managed to entice citizens to connect with the “public good”, for example by linking volunteers to people who need support, or requesting citizens to work for cultural projects and a better living environment. Government administrators and politicians should cherish such professionals *and* citizens.